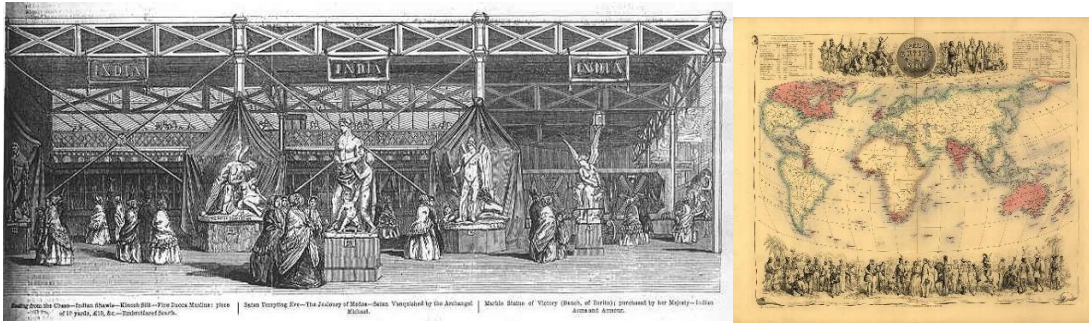


Conflicting Cartographies: Constructing a Counter Narrative of The Great Exhibition of 1851



Brief:

The Great Exhibition is a canonical subject of architecture history. The interior was highly curated; Arts, crafts, furniture and fabrics from select countries were exhibited along the transverse hall, flanked by larger rooms displaying “western” machinery from Belgium, France, and most prominently, England. Images and drawings of the exhibition echo the dominant Victorian narrative. But lying dormant in these representations are more complex histories, or “conflicting cartographies.” Among the countries on display were several colonies of the British Empire. Within the plan, then, are a set of geographic and social relations, governed by the import and export of goods, labor, culture and aesthetics. What message do the images, texts and drawings project as modes of representation, and how have they been received, supported or challenged throughout history? What contexts or sets of relations are organized in the exhibit and therefore within the global imaginary? How does the exhibit “essentialize” and how can analytical and representational devices be used to reveal hidden layers or voices absent from the plan?

Scope:

Your project is to provide a counter-narrative to the “allegory of progress” that the British plan presents us with. The class will read two texts, one literary and one critical, which will provide historical and contemporary understandings of the Great Exhibition. Each student should come to class prepared with quotes from the text along with selections from the online archives which are of interest. As a group the class will then examine, annotate, narrate and “thicken” the plan of the Exhibition using this research material. In teams of four, students will then develop a “Fotonovela” to portray a critical experience of walking through the exhibition, alternative to the one presented by the British in the archives. Four modes of inquiry should be addressed: 1. Historical Narrative (from the exhibition literature and its reception as published in news articles from the time); 2. Historical Event (physical encounters with the space, which can be “brought back to life” in your scenes); 3. Media (poetry, novels, songs etc. written about the GE which provide some new insight about its presence in the cultural imaginary); 4. Context (geographic or otherwise).

Schedule:

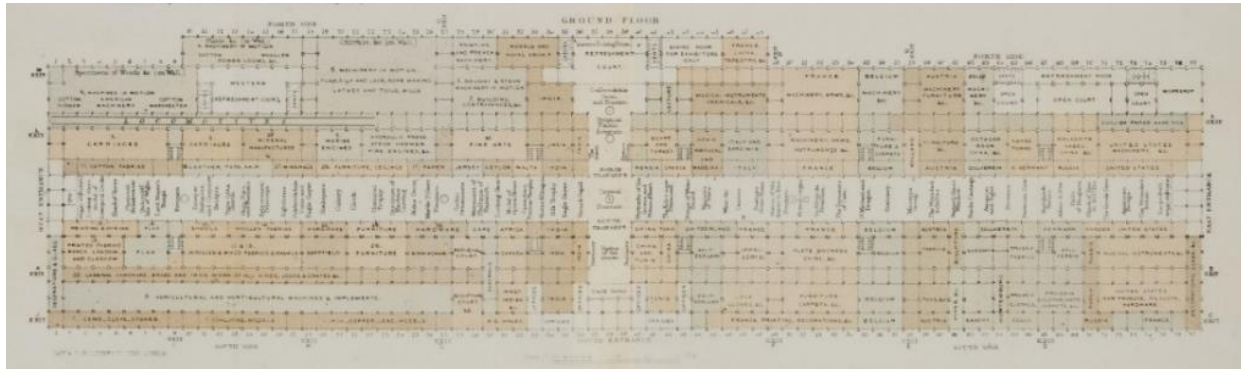
- Day 1: With background research, students will analyze and annotate a large shared plan as a class, generating a collective “thick” understanding of the exhibit and its implications.
- Day 3: In teams of four, students present their Fotonovela concepts. Sketches, images from the archive, historical data, quotes should be gathered in advance and presented as part of the “pitch.”
- Day 6: Students present their final Fotonovelas for review and discussion

Required Readings:

- Buzard, James, "Conflicting cartographies: globalism, nationalism, and the Crystal Palace floor plan" in *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007.
- Dickens, Charles & Richard H. Horne "The Great Exhibition and the Little One," *Household Words* (Vol. III, No. 67, 5 July 1851): 356-360

Archive:

- *Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures of the Great Exhibition of 1851*. London: Dickinson, 1852. <https://archive.org/details/Dickinsonscompr1/page/n10/mode/2up>
- *Official descriptive and illustrated catalogue of the Great exhibition of the works of industry of all nations, 1851*. <https://archive.org/details/officialcatalog06unkngoog/page/n11/mode/2up>



Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations,
1851.

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